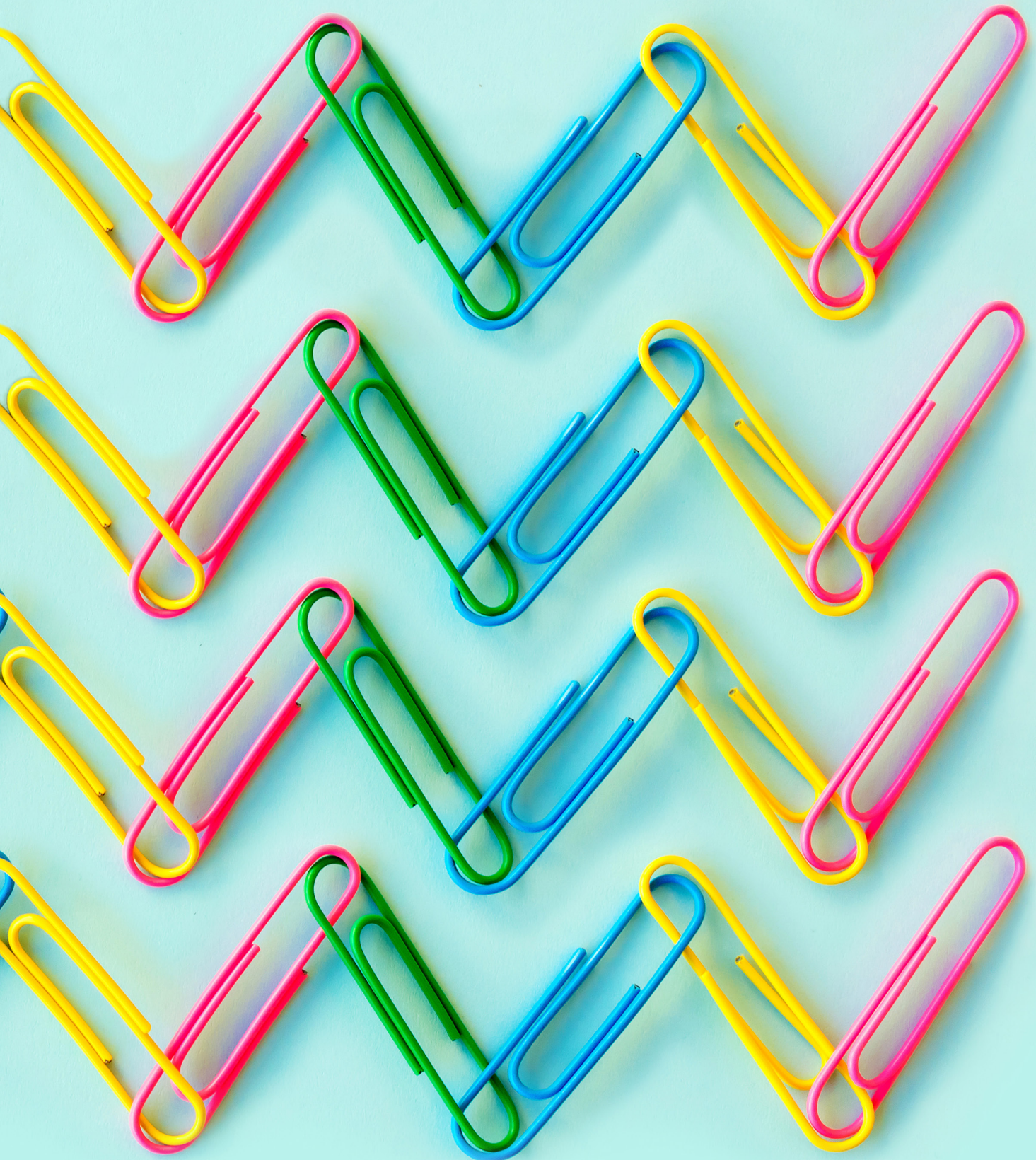# Form a Cooperative Relationship Between TD and DEI

TD professionals are in the best position to help DEI leaders make the progress companies need to keep moving forward.

BY PATTI P. PHILLIPS AND REBECCA L. RAY

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Since 2019, efforts to hire for the diversity, equity, and inclusion function have accelerated. According to *The Conference Board-Burning Glass Help Wanted Online Index,* DEI job ads increased by 227 percent between January 2015 and December 2021, with a 56 percent jump between 2020 and 2021. In addition, demand for executive-level DEI leaders between 2020 and 2021 increased by 32 percent. Sadly, those senior-level DEI positions bring with them higher levels of attrition. The average tenure for a chief diversity officer is less than two years.

The Conference Board's *Evolving Role of the DEI Leader* report reveals that turnover of DEI leaders can be attributed in part to the discrepancy between what the job ad calls for and the work the new leader must accomplish. Impassioned individuals join the ranks of senior leadership only to be overwhelmed with the volume of requests and lack of support. The good news is that is beginning to change as the DEI leader's role evolves.

While DEI becomes a core tenet of a company's culture and a competitive advantage, the talent development function can help ensure those leaders are successful. DEI and TD are both focused on people and performance, creating prime opportunities for a symbiotic relationship where they can support each other's goals.

How the DEI leader's work is changing

Historically, diversity work resided within the HR function, which approached DEI-related goals like other HR compliance activities. Today, the focus on DEI is no longer merely a compliance activity but a competitive advantage, affecting company culture, talent acquisition and retention, employee engagement, and business performance—all of which open doors for the TD function to step in and lend support.

David L. Gonzales, head of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Institute at the Conference Board, asserts that "We've got the title of chief diversity officer all wrong. The title should be chief officer of global competitiveness."

For many organizations, the DEI leader role now reports directly to the CEO, giving them greater visibility and influence and a clearer line of sight to the company's direction. For example, when creating the role of chief diversity officer, Genentech CEO Alexander Hardy decided the position would report directly to him. He recognized the need for the DEI leader to have an enterprise mindset and to think beyond basic representation goals. That sort of positioning enables the DEI leader to have a voice at the decision-making table and leverage buy-in for investment.

Research has found that DEI leadership roles have increasing responsibilities, broader reach, and mounting volumes of work. For instance, the Conference Board's *The ROI of Inclusion: How*

to Align Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with Business Results report identifies new areas of strategic work for DEI leaders, including a heightened focus on developing leadership accountability and addressing the connection between DEI and workers' psychological safety, mental health, and well-being. DEI leaders also must provide insight on the organization's value proposition and external communications, such as marketing and brand materials, and ideas for engaging with local communities.

As the DEI leader position evolves, so do the measures stakeholders use to gauge their success. Typical representation measures include gender, race, age, disability, military experience, national origin, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. DEI leaders are also accountable for preventive measures such as individual employee complaints, lawsuits, conflicts, absenteeism, and turnover as well as positive factors such as whether efforts affect job satisfaction and employee engagement.

A growing focus area for DEI leaders is driving organizational growth and competitiveness. Investment in DEI leads to improvement in revenue and productivity, quality of work, cost reduction, time savings, and innovation of productions and services. Improvement in those value-add measures demonstrates that the organization is leveraging its diverse workforce. Quita Beeler Highsmith, vice president and chief diversity officer at Genentech, explains that in her role she is responsible for enterprise-wide strategic initiatives that drive business impact by investing in commercial efforts, stakeholder engagement, research innovation, and community relations.

Skills for today's DEI leader

This time of redefining DEI leaders' responsibilities and skills requirements is a prime opportunity for TD functions to help DEI leaders evaluate their existing knowledge base and discover the necessary capabilities to grow the DEI function and ensure return on investment. The table below outlines the skills and job demands that have remained consistent over time, those that have increased in prominence and scope, and others that are new for the role.

Business acumen and project management, for instance, have long been important skills. In many companies, DEI leaders were previously involved in operations before becoming responsible for DEI. For example, prior to taking on DEI responsibilities at Nationwide, Angela Bretz served as associate vice president of property and casualty staff administration, where she oversaw strategic programs and management policies. Likewise, Amelia Williams Hardy, chief inclusion and diversity officer and senior vice president at Best Buy, spent more than 14 years at 3M in leadership roles where she was responsible for spearheading innovation, business revenue growth, and brand marketing.

One DEI leader notes that senior leaders from marketing, engineering, and other lines of business taking charge of DEI is becoming the norm, not the novelty. She adds that this sort of experience gives DEI leaders instant credibility among peers and insight into how to position inclusion and equity efforts.

New or changing skills and capabilities for DEI leaders include agility, coaching, analytics, design thinking, risk mitigation, and crisis response. DEI leaders' ability

Changes in DEI Leaders' Skills and Responsibilities

Skills and Demands That Have Remained Consistent	Skills and Demands That Have Increased in Prominence and Scope	Skills and Demands That Are New or Have Shifted Substantially
▪ Business acumen ▪ Subject matter expertise in diversity, equity, and inclusion ▪ Change management ▪ Cultural competence ▪ Project management ▪ Talent management ▪ Training and development	▪ Coaching (overall) ▪ Customer focus ▪ External communications and marketing ▪ Scorecards and DEI metrics ▪ Strategic thinking ▪ Work-life effectiveness and flexible working	▪ Agility ▪ Coaching executives and the board ▪ Analytics, people analytics, return on investment ▪ Crisis response ▪ Design thinking ▪ Mental health and well-being ▪ Risk mitigation

SOURCE: *THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE DEI LEADER,* THE CONFERENCE BOARD, 2021

to negotiate and help others in the C-suite see things holistically is another critical skill. Julia Boyd, senior director of HR for Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, agrees: "When it comes to DEI, leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less."

Gonzales believes that DEI leaders must also have visionary skills to be able to ambitiously reframe DEI as a core business strategy; demonstrated experience in business operations and profit and loss accountability; and a global mindset. He notes that they must also be collaborative executives who can balance competing societal, sustainability, and geopolitical issues.

So, what is TD's role in supporting new DEI leaders' goals and objectives?

Collaborate with the DEI leader

John Coné, catalyst for the Association for Talent Development's CTDO Next group, notes that "DEI and talent development must collaborate to democratize talent development and create equity in the employee experience—neither can do it alone." Michael Wright, vice president of leadership development at FM Global and former vice president of diversity and

health equity at Northwell Health, suggests that the collaboration include developing a playbook that helps leaders weave DEI in their strategy to drive outcomes.

A playbook may begin with the creation of a common language to enable meaningful conversations. Defining terms such as *diversity, equity, inclusion,* and *belonging* is a critical first step. For example, is diversity focused on race and gender, or is the definition broader? Does it include nationality, religion, and physical capability? Does the definition cover neurodiversity and the immunocompromised?

Become a student of DEI data

Less than 40 percent of organizations participating in the Con-ference Board research say that TD uses inclusion data. That is a missed opportunity. TD programs designed with inclusion in mind reinforce attitudes and behaviors required for an equita-ble culture. Without data, however, design falters.

For example, knowing the company's diverse makeup can help determine representation needs in mentoring programs, coaching engagements, and project-based learning experiences.

Aligning DEI With the Business

To align diversity, equity, and inclusion solutions with the organization's needs, program owners should consider the following questions.

Payoff needs
- What problem or opportunity is the organization facing?
- What is it worth to the organization to pursue that opportunity?
- What if we do nothing?

Business needs
- What key business measures, if improved, would indicate the organization is addressing the problem or taking advantage of the opportunity?
- How would we describe those measures? Is there opportunity to improve measures in all three categories of data (representation metrics—gender, age, race, disability; preventive metrics—lawsuits, turnover, job satisfaction, engagement; value-add metrics—revenue, innovation, societal impact)?

Performance needs
- What is happening or not happening that, if changed, will help address the business needs? (Consider behaviors, processes, and actions representative of equity and inclusion.)
- What is preventing the desired performance in those areas?
- What support is required to make (and sustain) performance changes?
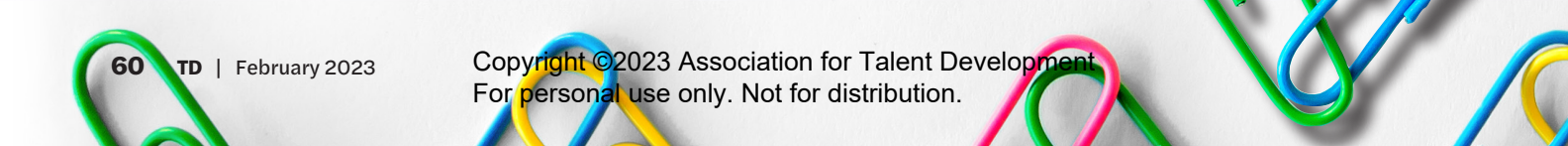- What are potential solutions that have a high likelihood of working given the organizational context?
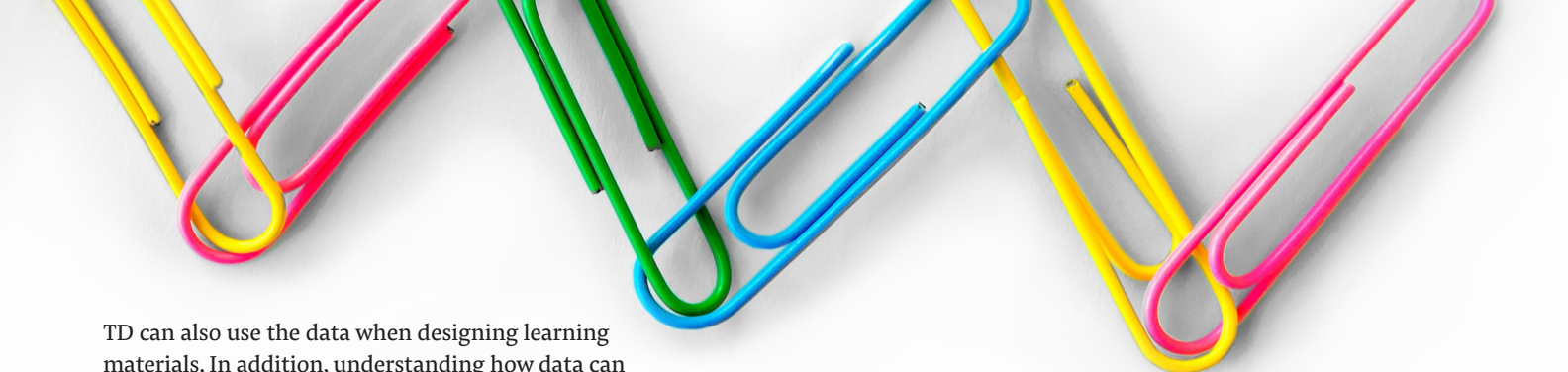
Learning needs
- What knowledge, skill, information, and insight could prepare people to overcome the barriers and deliver the change in performance?
- Which solutions could best address the learning needs?

Preference needs
- How could we deliver the knowledge, skill, information, and insight so people view participation as a worthy investment of their time and company resources?

Input needs
- Who needs to be involved?
- How much will it cost?
- What kind of mindset do people need going into the program, and how can we help them develop such a mindset?

TD can also use the data when designing learning materials. In addition, understanding how data can show the relationship between performance and feelings of belonging can help developers ensure a program's design and facilitation enable engagement across diverse populations.

Align DEI-related training with the business

Creating value through alignment is not a new concept for TD. Alignment begins with clarifying DEI challenges and opportunities for the organization and defining specific business measures DEI can improve. From there, assess what needs to change to improve those business measures. Look at both business and people data—but data only tells part of the story.

To understand team members' context and lived experiences, use qualitative research methods. Take, for instance, a financial institution experiencing high turnover, particularly in the customer service representative role at bank branches. That turnover was having a significant impact on customer loyalty. To determine the attrition's cause, focus groups discussed why they believed colleagues were leaving. The company found that certain populations believed they had limited autonomy and were excluded from opportunities to grow skills and advance their careers.

By having clarity around business needs, how performance must change, and who the stakeholders are, TD has more opportunities to deliver and demonstrate value to the organization. TD leaders should monitor DEI metrics and refer to them as they align programs with the company's needs. DEI and TD should likewise work together to define metrics that tell the most compelling story and include those metrics as part of their ongoing communication with the C-suite to demonstrate the value of investing in people.

Demonstrate the impact of DEI programs

According to LinkedIn Learning's *2022 Workplace Learning Report,* 26 percent of the focus area for L&D programs is DEI. But are those programs working? There is a long-standing argument (and evidence to support) that corporate DEI training does little to effect change in the workplace. That is partly because many organizations still treat DEI investments as compliance or awareness exercises. There is a misconception that DEI training is too soft to deliver anything more. However, nothing is further from the truth.

Take, for example, Tyson Foods, which developed a program to remove language and cultural barriers within its frontline workforce. As reported in "How a CSR Pilot Program Became a Key Business Imperative at Tyson Foods," because the pilot demonstrated a return on investment, the company scaled the program organization-wide as the Upward Academy. The initiative led to a decrease in turnover and a 123 percent return on investment, and employees reported feeling happier at work, better equipped to carry out responsibilities at home and at work, and an increased connection and feeling of inclusion in the workplace.

Demonstrating that TD-created value gives DEI leaders the evidence they need—in terms that resonate with C-suite and frontline leaders—to make the case that DEI is a worthy investment.

Integrate DEI into every TD opportunity

Seamlessly integrating DEI into all aspects of instructional design and delivery is one way to ensure that the tie between DEI and talent development is strong. Doing so means that the DEI talk goes away but action stays—DEI itself is woven into the fabric of the culture.

Consider building DEI language into programs. Common language is the first step toward accessibility for all. Also consider the representation and accessibility of visual elements such as graphics and color schemes. Then ensure that content is accessible from a physical standpoint. Hybrid content delivery offers a big opportunity for that. Turning on the accessibility settings in the chosen communication platform is a simple step yet one people don't often take.

Being intentional about cohort design and diversity in breakout sessions are other ways to integrate DEI into TD. For example, when creating cohorts for leadership development programs, be sure the grouping process considers diversity-related demographics such as race, gender, and age. If you have trouble building a diverse cohort, that's likely an indicator that there are inclusion issues with the succession planning process. That presents an opportunity for TD to collaborate with the DEI leader.

Hand in glove

Mounting evidence shows there's a vital connection between DEI, employee engagement, and business results. But to be a truly inclusive organization, the DEI and TD functions must have a cooperative relationship. And achieving equity will occur through their collaboration, alignment, and seamless integration.

As Coné explains, "DEI leaders need talent development to help them do their job. Talent development needs the DEI leader to be clear on what that job is."

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